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ABSTRACT

This study examined how philosophies of general education are enacted at two higher education institutions by those persons charged with implementation. The study proceeded using case study methods and week-long visits to the two institutions, one holding a "Liberal Arts I" Carnegie classification, and the other holding a "Research I" Carnegie classification. The two were selected to maximize variation in the sampling. At each institution interviews were conducted with faculty, department and division chairs, associate deans, deans, registrars, advisors, other administrators, students, and one president. Document analysis and the personal observations of the researcher were also utilized to achieve a triangulation of data sources. Observation of the liberal arts college found a clear and commonly held vision for the institution that provided general agreement concerning the administration and maintenance of the general education curriculum. The culture of the research university was characterized by distances: distances between students, faculty and administrators. Analysis and comparison revealed one major theme, that administrators at both institutions were actively involved in the curriculum, more involved than they themselves seemed to realize. Though administrators were thoroughly involved with all of the processes of the curriculum they maintained that the faculty "own" the curriculum. (Includes 16 references.) (JB)

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General Education and Institutional Culture

A Case Study in Progress

Nan Tönjes

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For Presentation at the Meeting of

The Association for the Study of Higher Education

October, 1992

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ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Marriott City Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, October 29 - November 1, 1992. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Introduction

Educators have worried about the erosion of general education in the curriculum since higher education began to expand beyond the trivium and quadrivium. The recent national reports and studies (Bennett, 1984; Bloom, 1988; Cheney, 1989; Hirsch, 1988) go so far as to relate its importance to the general well-being of our nation, and, indeed, it would be difficult to disagree with much of what these reports have to say. Basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics are essential to a work force that has evolved from an industrial one to a technological one. Despite differences of opinion regarding content, few would deny the importance of studying world cultures and civilizations in an ever-changing society. And the knowledge explosion has made critical thinking more important than ever. This sense of urgency regarding the curriculum has resulted in much attention to the size, content, and configuration of general education (El-Khawas, 1991; Gaff, 1991).

There is, however, a developing notion that all of this attention makes a difference in theory only (Spear, 1989) and that the battles over the relative merits of size, content, and relevancy are intellectual

exercises that have taken on a kind of ritualistic importance for the academic community of faculty and administrators that bears little resemblance to what actually happens to the curriculum (Spear, 1989). The actual education that the student receives may be influenced more by the practical, every day concerns of packaging and implementing the curriculum. Most research, however, has focused on the decision-making process (e.g., Conrad and Pratt, 1983) or descriptions of innovative curricula (e.g., Bergquist, 1977). These studies assume that curricula are implemented and delivered to students just as they were originally designed and represented on paper. Until the general education curriculum can be understood in its practical, life-giving activities, as well as in its philosophical and political realities, we will not be able to meet the challenges presented in the recent commentaries on higher education.

This study examines how an institution's philosophy of general education is enacted by those persons who are charged with the practical implementation of the general education curriculum. Here, "philosophy" refers both to formal statements of

institutional philosophy and also to cultural influences (e.g., "our tradition dictates that this is how it is to be done"). When day-to-day actions and processes are understood in conjunction with content, instructional innovations, and formal philosophies of the curriculum, we will have a more complete body of knowledge regarding general education in our colleges and universities.

Conceptual Framework

Gareth Morgan (1986) uses metaphors as "ways of thinking" about organizations. Thinking about an organization as a culture, one of Morgan's metaphors, allows us to deal with its ambiguity and complexity and allows us to study it as a socially constructed reality. This study, then, is grounded in a focused cultural approach to curriculum, a concept advanced by Tierney (1989) and McGrath & Spear (1991). Rather than accepting Ralph Tyler's (1950) model that the curriculum can be understood as a rational process of defining objectives, identifying suitable experiences to attain those objectives, and then evaluating the effectiveness of the experiences, this approach

assumes, with Tierney (1989), that the institution and the curriculum are not reified entities that can be understood objectively. Curriculum participants are constrained by the traditions and ideological formations of the institution, and McGrath and Spear (1991) point out that studying this phenomenon requires an appreciation of cultural dynamics that is not available within a purely rational approach. Consequently, it is important to examine the actions, symbolic and real, of the many organizational actors involved with the curriculum. Moreover, these actions must be viewed from the perspective of the actors themselves and in the context of institutional culture.

It is suggested, then, that it is important to better understand the day-to-day, institutional process of delivering general education. This study will attempt to answer the following questions: What are the factors, in addition to curricular innovation and content, that bring life to a curriculum? Who are the participants in this process? What do the participants in the process do, and how do they do it? It is important in our efforts to improve general education to understand the pitfalls inherent in even the best

designed curriculum, and to know the frustrations experienced by those who are charged with its care. Another factor to be considered is how all of these questions are influenced by the idiosyncracies of institutional culture.

Method and Data Source

Case study methods were used to address these research questions. This exploratory study, still on going, was begun in March, 1992 with week-long visits to two Midwestern institutions, one holding a "Liberal Arts I" Carnegie classification, and the other holding a "Research I" Carnegie classification. These two institutional types were selected to maximize variation in the sampling. Limited time and resources required identifying information-rich cases, and, as suggested by Michael Patton (1990), choosing two institutions that are extremely different will cast any emerging common patterns in a very interesting light and will be valuable in studying the shared aspects of the institutions.

Permission to conduct the research was arranged through a contact person at each institution: the dean

of the college at the liberal arts institution, and the associate dean of the college of liberal arts at the research institution. At each institution interviews were conducted with faculty, department and division chairs, associate deans, deans, registrars, advisors, other administrators, students, and one president. Interview questions followed an interview protocol which was designed to allow the subjects to state their understanding of the institutional philosophy for general education, to describe how they think this philosophy is carried out, to recount how they are personally involved in the process, and to relate their perceptions of the problems and challenges. All interviews were tape-recorded, and transcriptions are in progress. Interview subjects are being given the opportunity to review transcripts and make additional comments.

Document analysis and the personal observations of the researcher have also been utilized to achieve a triangulation of data sources. The contact person at each institution provided documents suggested by the researcher and included other documents not specifically requested but germane to the study. The

researcher was alert to artifacts and traditions on the campuses that related to institutional culture and the importance of general education. The process of passing back the interview transcriptions to the subjects and the review of relevant documents present further opportunities for dialogue between the institutions and the researcher.

The data is being analyzed using coding strategies and organizational techniques described by Bogdan and Biklen (1982) and Michael Patton (1990). The resulting data base is being stored and arranged through the use of The Ethnograph, a computer software program developed by Seidel, Kjolseth, and Seymour (1988). The analysis presented in this paper is based on the completed transcriptions and content analysis of interviews with eleven administrators (four at the liberal arts college and seven at the research institution, two student focus group interviews (one group of five students at each institution), and document analysis of printed materials supplied by the contact persons at each institution. Additionally, fourteen faculty members (seven at each institution), most of whom were department or division chairs, were

interviewed, but the content analysis of those interviews has not yet been completed. Finally, the personal observations of the researcher and informal and unrecorded conversations with faculty and administrators also contributed to the "fleshing-out" of the case studies.

This report focuses on the following major points: (a) the philosophy of the institution for its general education curriculum, (b) the ability of administrators to articulate that philosophy, (c) examples of the institutional culture in which the administration carries out its work, (d) the nature of the involvement of administrators with general education, and (e) any evidences of constraints or enhancements to these efforts. Future analysis will deal with faculty perspectives on the day-to-day processes of maintaining the curriculum, leadership in the area of general education, and ways that new members of the academic community are introduced to the institution's philosophy for general education.

The Case of the Liberal Arts Institution

This Midwestern college has approximately 2100 students and 150 full time faculty. It offers three degrees: the Bachelor of Arts, the Bachelor of Music, and the Bachelor of Music Education. Founded in 1860 by immigrants, its chief mission was to provide leaders for the new churches of its religious affiliation being organized in America.

The president and associate dean are both graduates of the college and have held their current positions for sixteen and eleven years respectively. The registrar has held his current position for seven years but was a member of the faculty for eight years prior to becoming registrar. The dean is the newest arrival to the academic administration, having come to the college in 1988. All of these administrators (all male) have faculty rank, and all but the registrar still teach at least one course a year. There are no assistant deans at the college.

Morgan (1986) suggests that understanding an institution's culture reveals the truly human aspect of an organization and that those who possess this

understanding can be participants in "the management of meaning." The administrators at the liberal arts college frequently commented on the cultural aspects of the institution (twenty-four instances of talk about culture out of four administrators interviewed). This is significant in light of the fact that an interview protocol was used so that all administrators interviewed were asked the same questions, and although there was no specific question soliciting remarks about institutional culture, references to culture were spontaneous in the responses from the liberal arts college administration when they were speaking of their institution.

Morgan (1986) cautions that improved understanding of the links between culture and organizational success has led some managers to attempt to change the institutional culture of their organizations, an action that is usually met with resistance and resentment. It was apparent that the institutional "meaning" has been cultivated very carefully at the liberal arts institution. Administrators there frequently talked about their institutional history and how that has influenced the evolution of their curriculum. In fact,

their curriculum and culture seem to be so closely identified as to be almost a single entity.

Two administrators told the same story of the time when the "Carnegie folks" ruled that the institution had evolved from its liberal arts classification into a comprehensive college classification. It turned out to be a mistake on the part of the Carnegie Foundation, and the college eventually regained its liberal arts classification, but the situation caused an institutional furor. The president himself flew to Princeton to have the classification corrected, and this event was spoken of almost in tones of a leader being involved in an heroic struggle. He obviously was representing the collective institutional thinking on the subject. Interestingly enough in the period of time that the college was classified as a comprehensive college, it made one of the popular lists of best colleges, and the two persons who spoke of this incident were in agreement that the college never would have made the list as a liberal arts college due to the institutions with which it would be competing. Nevertheless, the two administrators gave the impression that there was a feeling of unrest at the

college until it had been given back its liberal arts classification. One administrator likened it to whether it would be better to be concert mistress in the Fargo Philharmonic or play violin in the Chicago Symphony even if three rows back. This administrator would choose Chicago, and he believed the college was unified in that preference.

The college defines general education in terms of courses, skills, and disciplines. There are no references to a core curriculum in its literature or in conversations with its administrators. Rather, general education is simply referred to as "the requirements for graduation" without venturing into deeply philosophical rationales for the requirements. These requirements have evolved slowly from the college's cultural and historical dual heritage of German-Scandinavian and English-American roots: disciplines which were deemed to produce the gebildete mensch and the "learned gentleman," in the words of one administrator. They require that the student accumulate credits in five areas, resulting in a 15, 12, 9, 6 and 6 array. The student can choose the number of credits he or she accumulates in a given area

as long as the end result conforms to the 15, 12, 9, 6 and 6 design.

Administrators were able to speak at length on the college's philosophy as if to explain the absence of any definitive statement in the catalog or other materials. Their responses suggested that they had given the matter considerable thought. As previously mentioned, expressions about the philosophy of general education often equate the college in its cultural context with the curriculum in its philosophical context. One administrator simply remarked, "you asked what our idea of general education is--it's basically what we do." Another administrator expressed it this way:

> It's really about classes and labs and lectures.... That's what the school is, and my view is that the rest of us, I mean the deans and the president, and the cooks, and the janitors are here to support that. What it's really about is this curriculum.

Later in the interview, the same administrator came back to the idea with the following revelation:

> And over and over I've discovered that...in the sixteen or seventeen years I've had this job--that what it really gets down to, both in the sense of academic principle and in the political reality of living here every day, is courses and departments, or fields and disciplines.

As one might expect, the students also do not try to find any deep philosophical rationales for the meaning of general education at their institution. In the focus group interview the researcher asked "how do you think [name of institution] would describe a well-educated person? After a very long silence, one student offered, "Fifteen, twelve, nine, six and six!"

The religious affiliation of the liberal arts college makes an obvious difference in its ability to address issues of religion and values. Said one administrator: "It is an obligation this college has to students to provide them the opportunity, or not only the opportunity, but to force on them some thinking about values and religious issues." Another administrator talked of a recent curricular reform having arisen out of "a recognition, even a concern that a number of the faculty had that the students had

no or very little understanding of biblical tradition."

While care has been taken to include elements that the faculty deem essential, the curriculum still allows a considerable amount of individual freedom for students to choose courses. This feature has seemed to emanate from a realization that there is no perfect curriculum. It was expressed by one administrator at the liberal arts college in this way:

> I think you're supposed to be educated by choosing, for whatever reason, to avoid something. You're not going to be the renaissance man or woman now-a-days to be educated. There's just too much out there. But each choice has a cost, and if I really don't understand literature, then I've got to understand social science a little more.... When you get all done, <u>that</u> kind of education to me seems to be the one that will best prepare a person to continue to grow because you haven't been turned off on anything... And maybe later in life when the moment's right, the teachable moment... At that point, if you have learned to love the things that you've studied, then you'll be much more willing to go back.

Another administrator simply remarked, "the things that make our lives really worth living--these things you can't force on somebody at 18."

Students interviewed were confident that they were getting a good education. They spoke of the value of taking courses in a number of different areas, and they said that many students became interested in things that they would not have otherwise. They were very fond of their school, and, if not able to be terribly philosophical, one student expressed the value of general education, perhaps as well as anyone could, by saying that it prevented you from being like Cliff Clavin on *Cheers* -- someone who thinks he knows a lot but really doesn't.

Whatever the change or reform, policy decisions and actions are studied and deliberate at the liberal arts college. The college has a self-confidence that is apparent. The first page of the catalog gives evidence of this characteristic: "Through the years the curriculum has been developed carefully. Changes have been evolutionary rather than revolutionary, largely due to the proven ability of the curriculum to prepare students for challenging work and a meaningful

life." Even though the college was able to implement a new curriculum in the almost record time of a year and a half, it is evident that changes still need to evolve naturally within the cultural context of the institution. Changes that are not rooted in the institutional culture are met with the resistance that Morgan (1986) described, whether initiated by administrators or faculty. One administrator told the story of a period of time in the '70s when the job market resulted in some faculty being hired who "never would have been hired before." He went on to say:

> And there were also people who had stronger and longer ties to the college--some who were graduates of the college. But there were a number of people who had other kinds of backgrounds who wanted, who sought very quickly to try to make some change. For the most part they've been unsuccessful. Many of them left or were forced to leave...

There is a strong sense at the liberal arts college that the graduation requirements reflect the very core beliefs and value structure of the institution. The curriculum is "what we do," and it is "who we are."

When the researcher remarked on one administrator's description of the curriculum as being "what it's really about," he broke in with "hey, but that's like saying I love my wife, or I'm really glad I've got my kids and my dog." There is a confidence at the institution that seems to allow its general education curriculum to be almost *de rigueur*.

The personal involvement of the administrators in the on going maintenance and implementation of the general education curriculum is also taken for granted. They are all very active in this area, but they consistently stress that all important matters are decided by the faculty. One of them described how he might lobby for a certain issue as a faculty member but would never do so in his role as an administrator. He believed that both he and the faculty understood this. At the request of the faculty, the president of the institution chaired the ad hoc committee that formulated the present graduation requirements, and the dean of the college chairs the permanent General Education and Educational Policies Committees. While this would seem to be considerable administrative involvement in the curriculum, a number of faculty

members interviewed indicated that they would welcome more leadership from the administration in curricular matters.

The close relationship of the administration to the faculty was illustrated by one administrator who said, "an advantage that this college has enjoyed, and I trust we're still going to continue to enjoy it, is that the administration is not separate from the faculty. So when you talk about the administration, it isn't 'over there.'"

Administrator involvement in the curriculum at the liberal arts institution ranges from the formal (work on committees) to informal and impromptu meetings. While final decisions are reached in the formal committees or by full faculty vote, it was apparent that the genuine, life-giving activities take place in very informal settings. A question the researcher asked each administrator was: "If I could be standing over your shoulder watching what you do when you involve yourself with the curriculum, what kinds of things would I see you do?" In response, one administrator said, "Discussing. Just talking. And it would be informal--coffee breaks, lunch, meetings on

the sidewalk." He even described how he might discuss ideas for first-year sequences while showering in the gym after his mid-day workout.

One top-level administrator described some heated discussions during the process of formulating the new graduation requirements--he actually used the metaphor "bubbling stew" for the process--that were full of intense feelings not only of "turf protection" (his words), but also feelings of deep commitment to principles (also his words).

But there was also evidence that people were willing to compromise their principles. One administrator echoed sentiments heard from all those interviewed when he said, "I think the general education as it now stands is probably not the way anybody would prefer it to be. Nobody would say 'this is the way I want it,' but everybody can live with it." Another administrator related that when the General Education Committee defined the necessary criteria for a course to fulfill the cross-cultural requirement, very few course syllabi submitted met the criteria. Yet most of them were approved because the committee was loath to turn down requests from their colleagues.

A similar sentiment was expressed when the researcher was talking to a faculty member in the faculty dining room and was describing a process for approving courses for the new core at her own institution. She wondered if the faculty committee at her institution would ever really turn down a course. The faculty member exclaimed, "Well, right, because, after all, you've still got to eat lunch with those people!"

The faculty lunch room, in fact, is itself a cultural artifact at this institution. The numerous references to the informal discussions that go on at lunch or during coffee breaks in the room make it apparent that some important, albeit informal, work gets done there. It is a rather formal room, and the tables are set with linen tablecloths. About ten round tables that seat six persons each and a buffet table along one side fill the room. Built as an extension of the College Center, the idea was conceived by the president who secured the funding for its construction. The president and other administrators eat in the facility along with many of the faculty. The researcher observed that diners, including the president and other administrators, usually sat down at

whatever table had space regardless of department affiliation until that table was full, and then another table was started. There seemed to be an unwritten rule of etiquette about this. The room was pleasant--light and airy--and much laughter and light-hearted discussion could be heard there. The researcher mused that it would indeed be difficult to harshly judge the work of a colleague and still continue this ritual day after day.

The Case of the Research Institution

A major research university located in the Midwest, this institution has a total enrollment of over 29,000. The college of liberal arts, the academic unit that was the focus of the study, enrolls over 16,000 students and is composed of three divisions, six schools, and more than forty departments. The college offers the Bachelor of Arts, the Bachelor of Science, the Bachelor of Fine Arts, the Bachelor of General Studies, the Bachelor of Liberal Studies, and the Bachelor of Music degrees. Of the public four-year universities in the state, this institution is

considered to place the most emphasis on the liberal arts. All students who graduate from the college of liberal arts (the academic home of fifty-five percent of the institution's total enrollment) are required to satisfy the requirements of the general education curriculum. This component consists of a minimum of forty-two semester hours in nine academic areas with additional work required for students who have not fulfilled the foreign language requirement in high school. The same courses which are designated as general education requirements (GERs) in the college of liberal arts are also used to fulfill general education requirements in the university's other academic units.

The academic unit is led by a dean and three associate deans over academic programs, development and research, and faculty. The associate deans come from the faculty and typically serve three years in administration before returning to the faculty. An exception to this is the associate dean for academic programs, the contact person for this study, who is serving his third three-year term. The dean, associate dean for academic programs, the associate director and assistant director of the liberal arts office of

academic programs, and the director and assistant director of the academic advising center were interviewed for this study (four women and three men).

The administrators of the research institution, with its well-articulated philosophy for general education as stated in its catalog and its lengthy documents on mission, strategic plans, and printed guidelines for committees that work on general education, talked only in small measure about their institution's philosophy of general education and even less about matters of institutional culture. (There were five instances of talk about culture out of seven administrators interviewed, compared with twenty-four instances of talk about culture out of four administrators interviewed at the liberal arts college.)

The descriptions of culture that were expressed by administrators at the research institution predominantly centered on the cultural homogeneity of the faculty, staff, and students. Three administrators commented on their concern that this homogeneity resulted in a narrowness of thinking that the institution needed to work hard to overcome.

Also, as a cultural statement arising from a discussion of the influence of political correctness, one administrator offered:

> On the whole we haven't had problems, by which I mean to say, the issue of how far you can go in allowing free expression on sensitive subjects has just not become very pointed on this campus. It seems to me that common courtesy and common sense and common decency have been sufficient not to raise this as a major issue.

This attribute of "common courtesy," is echoed in the institution's strategic plan which envisions the institution in the 21st century as "imbued with the values of civility and community of its Midwestern context."

The philosophy behind the general education requirements is not unlike that of the liberal arts college--to paraphrase, there are certain things that need to be known and certain ways of thinking that need to be experienced in order for a person to be truly educated. Yet many of the administrators interviewed seemed to think that the philosophy was not articulated well. One administrator compared it to a Virginia

Woolf novel: "You know, you sort of grasp it, and then you don't." He did not believe the institution's statement on general education explains the purpose of the requirements or shows any connection among the nine various groups of requirements.

Another administrator, when asked about the philosophy of the general education requirements, was almost wistful in describing the difficulties in focusing on philosophical issues:

> So--I wish I had more time to deal with the philosophy of general education. I do try to read a lot of the literature and try to think about undergraduate education for young people these days. But as far as the time in this office to sit and reflect... The other day I was looking out the window, thinking about... quiet thoughts about higher education. Those are few and far between because there are just a lot of details...

In the realization that their efforts in working with the curriculum are not perfect, there also seems to be the belief that there can be no perfect curriculum. Caution and common sense are valued. The researcher was told that, on the whole, changes in the

general education program over the years have been small and that there has been a kind of administrative philosophy at the institution for slow, incremental changes. The institution has chosen a course of continuous review for general education requirements rather than a total revamping of the curriculum every few years.

The maintenance structure for general education includes coordinating committees representing the nine areas of the general education curriculum. Courses that fulfill general education requirements (GERs) are reviewed periodically by these committees on a schedule maintained in the office of the associate dean for academic programs. The committees also review new courses that are submitted to be GERs. The recommendations of the coordinating committees are passed on to the Educational Policy Committee, chaired by the associate dean for academic programs, for final approval.

By far, the descriptions of administrative involvement in the curriculum focus on actions that assist the faculty. In the words of one administrator: "In comparison with some peer institutions, we are

under-administered rather than over-administered, and that comes forward in an attitude that departments are a group of individuals that know how to do their job, and administrators let them do their job and don't do a lot of heavy-handed management." There were numerous references to activities that they engage in to try to assist the faculty to reach decisions. These activities range from simply arranging meetings and supplying information to doing a "think piece" on a controversial issue in order to "help the faculty think it through."

Despite the substantial organizational structure and administrative assistance for the process of maintaining the general education curriculum, the mid-management level administrators see a need for more efforts to show students why general education is important. These administrators, who deal closely with students, seemed to be more emotionally invested in the importance of general education than the level of administration that deals more directly with the faculty. One adviser gave voice to her feelings by saying that she wished the university would be more "up front" with students about why general education is

important. She went on to say:

> I mean the fact that their minds are going to change about things. They'll come out of that general education looking at the world differently as different people than they were. Their certainties will be shaken... things like that where you can just yank the rug out from under somebody and get them thinking about their relationship to the culture of which they're a part. I wish that we could brainwash people a little bit more as they come in about that so that they know why they're being asked to go through what they're being asked to do.

Indeed, the students in the focus group seemed to not know for sure why they were asked to go through these things. They told both horror stories and stories of significant educational experiences. Some of their stories were stories of survival. They laughingly told about some of their large lecture classes. (One famous example at this institution actually has 800 students enrolled.) One of the young men said that, first, it's a real decision about where to sit in such a class. You have to decide if you want

to be under one of the speakers and hear the professor's voice blaring in your ears or if you want to sit closer to the professor and hear his actual voice mixed in with the delayed sound of his voice from the speakers. A young woman said that if you sit on one of the top rows of the amphitheater-type lecture hall, the professor is this "little-bitty, tiny man way down there." Sitting this distance from the professor, they said, sometimes makes the voice of the professor become a distraction from the interesting things that your friends around you are doing and saying.

There are some distances that are evident among the various participants in the general education process. The higher-level administration seems to feel that they are distant from the philosophical decisions that are made concerning general education even though they participate importantly through their support roles. Mid-level administrators express their appreciation for being allowed to "hear the debate" in faculty assembly meetings, even though they have no vote, because it assists them in their explanations to students. They do not feel constrained from taking issues to the faculty, but even in saying this, there

is an implied distance. Students also experience a feeling of distance which is sometimes quite physical, as in the case of the 800-student lecture course. More significantly, and perhaps understandably, students are unsure about the significance of what they experience. They think they are getting a good education, but they're not sure why.

The problem of distance is not surprising in an institution of this size. It also does not mean that important work is not being done to maintain a quality educational experience. Interview transcripts reveal a busy institution with many hard-working people who are committed to improving the delivery of general education. The distance or size factor is itself part of the culture of the institution. It changes the way people work. Administrators write "think pieces" instead of discussing a controversial issue with faculty over a coffee break or a meeting on the sidewalk. The common courtesy that was described by an administrator and referred to in the university's strategic plan is perhaps a way to minimize the size factor and strengthen the academic community.

Conclusions

One major theme has surfaced in this study, and that is that administrators are actively involved in the curriculum, more involved than they themselves seem to realize. They will say that their involvement takes the form of support and assistance only--that the philosophical decisions and important policies are the prerogative of the faculty. And yet...

* they suggest ideas (on sidewalks, at coffee breaks, or in "think pieces"),
* they ask pointed questions,
* they listen to debates so they can translate the philosophical problems to students,
* they get frustrated when the institution's philosophy of general education does not make appropriate connections,
* they talk to parents about general education,
* they design advising systems and course review structures that prevent chaos,
* they teach classes themselves (many of them),
* they nurture the academic community of the institution, and

* they provide appropriate support for intellectual ideas.

A pattern is developing as these findings are analyzed, a pattern evident in both institutions which seems to point toward the existence of three streams of consciousness regarding the general education curriculum: that of faculty, that of the academic administration, and that of students. Sometimes there are overlapping areas among the streams of consciousness which present areas of common awareness, if not agreement, among all respondents. Administrators at both institutions, as different as the institutions are, are thoroughly involved with all of the life-giving processes of the curriculum, and yet they still maintain that the faculty "own" the curriculum. There is definitely an overlapping of belief among the faculty and administrative streams of consciousness on this point. The question becomes: Is it entirely true?

It is also the areas where there is no overlapping that invite further study. These could well be the areas that make the general education curriculum seem

to be more than the sum of its parts. This part of the study must wait until faculty responses are analyzed.

Studying these streams of consciousness frames some important questions: Would the curriculum benefit from more awareness among the streams of consciousness? Should our goal be to strive for more areas of overlap, or is tension between and among the streams of consciousness a healthy condition? Perhaps these questions can redirect our thinking about the curriculum.

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